

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Scientific Integrity Program**

Inquiry Report and Determination for Allegation 20.15

Background on scientific integrity

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is dedicated to preserving the integrity of the scientific and scholarly activities it conducts and that are conducted on its behalf. The EPA Scientific Integrity Policy¹, dated February 2012, provides principles and standards to ensure scientific integrity in the conduct, use, and communication of science. When this policy is not adhered to, or is circumvented, the robustness of EPA science and the trust in the results of our scientific work can be impacted, causing a loss of scientific integrity. Loss of scientific integrity is the result of a deliberate action by an employee that compromises the conduct, production, use of scientific and scholarly activities and assessments. EPA strives to prevent loss of integrity in the performance of scientific and scholarly activities or in the application of science in its decision making.

Allegations of the loss of scientific or scholarly integrity are submitted to the EPA's Scientific Integrity Official (ScIO). Three criteria are considered when establishing a loss of scientific integrity:

- a. There is a significant departure from accepted practices or established procedures;
- b. The actions causing the loss of integrity are committed intentionally, knowingly or recklessly; and,
- c. The allegation is proven by a preponderance of evidence.

When the Scientific Integrity Program finds a violation, it issues recommendations to safeguard the science. When it finds no violations but believes it can assist the participants in advancing scientific integrity considerations, the Scientific Integrity Program provides advice.

Origin of this report

The Scientific Integrity Official launched the inquiry that is the subject of this report in response to a query that was originally submitted to ethics@epa.gov on April 9, 2020. The query was forwarded to OGC and then to the Scientific Integrity Program. This query was submitted to ethics@epa.gov by a former Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education (ORISE) participant with EPA's National Center for Computational Toxicology (NCCT) and includes an allegation of a lapse of scientific integrity. The allegation asserts that attribution for the scientific work of the ORISE participant was missing from a recent journal publication. The Scientific Integrity Program was informed by OGC that there may be a legal complication regarding this inquiry; therefore, the Scientific Integrity Program waited to begin the inquiry until it was determined by OGC that there were no outstanding legal issues. The Scientific Integrity Program began the inquiry on August 27, 2020.

¹ https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2014-02/documents/scientific_integrity_policy_2012.pdf

September 17, 2020

Additionally, on August 20, 2020, the Associate Science Editor for the journal contacted ethics@epa.gov regarding this allegation. The Associate Science Editor indicated that the ORISE participant had also contacted the journal directly with this allegation.

Method of inquiry

The Scientific Integrity Program met with the senior EPA author of the paper to discuss the ORISE participant's role in the publication. The senior author indicated that the ORISE participant had not contributed significantly to the publication. The senior author also indicated that there were legal proceedings involving the ORISE participant's work at EPA and that he/she had been instructed by his/her supervisor not to have further contact with the ORISE participant.

The Scientific Integrity Program consulted with OGC; OGC agreed that the legal issues should not be considered in determining whether a lapse in scientific integrity occurred.

The Scientific Integrity Program and two representatives from OGC met with the Associate Science Editor and Senior Science Editor of the journal on September 3, 2020. The editors indicated that they had launched an official investigation into the issue. As the journal editors are the ultimate arbiters of the information published, the Scientific Integrity Program agreed that the journal should make the final determination regarding authorship.

Determination

The journal editors found that the authorship list of the publication was appropriate and no action was taken by the journal. As such, the allegation is unsubstantiated. On September 16, 2020 the journal completed its investigation and informed the ORISE participant of the findings.

Summary for Annual Report

A former Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education (ORISE) participant alleged that his/her name was inappropriately excluded from the authorship list of a journal article.

Summary: The editors of the journal conducted an independent investigation into the allegation. The Scientific Integrity Program was consulted by the editors of the journal as part of their investigation. The editors of the journal found the allegation to be unsubstantiated. No action was taken by the journal.